

January 31, 2012

Committee Members

My name is Renee Sumerix. I am the parent of Lauren Sumerix, a student enrolled in Eaton Rapids Virtual School and a graduate of American Intercontinental University Online. As a result of our experience and difficulty in obtaining placement to facilitate the best learning option for Lauren, am writing support Senate Bill 619; to assist families similarly situated.

Senate Bill 619, if passed affords choice; testimony heard has indicated as much. Opponents point to the singular focus on choice as being narrow in scope and not cognitive of the potential harm to students and education as a whole. Although the most beneficial result of passing this legislation is providing options in education, it is anything but narrow – it is a gateway for positive outcomes for all stakeholders. The term stakeholder's is broad and includes students, parents, educators, schools, legislators, and unions. The order in which they are listed is, in my opinion, the order in which the varied interests should be weighted.

STUDENTS

Let us begin with the most important element- STUDENTS. It is well documented that effective methods of instruction are varied dependent on the individual. Influences include: The lesson structure, whether logically sequenced or fluid to accommodate creativity; Sociological factors, peer learners or introverted students both benefit from group activities but the latter may actually gain more knowledge with individual study; Auditory and Visual Stimulation, lecture is considered the least effective teaching method yet some students learn best by listening while others with ocular stimulation; Tactile, hands on activities offer ability to learn through doing; Environmental Factors, formal vs. informal is similarly dependent on individual learning style, as is noise level and distractions (Larson, 2001-2011). These factors lend to decisions on a learning environment that provides the best fit for each student.

The Michigan Merit Curriculum as signed into law on April 20, 2006, requires students to have an online course or learning experience. To satisfy this requirement, the student must either have successfully completed at least 1 course or learning experience that is presented online or participate in an integrated online experience throughout the high school curriculum (Michigan Department of Education , 2010). This signifies the importance of ability to learn in an online environment as an essential part of educating students to succeed. Arguably, depending on the student, a brick and mortar, cyber, or blended environment may provide the vehicle to success.

In today's society students are exposed to economic, social, cultural, and health influences that impact their ability to learn as much as the method of delivery. Therefore, options to: work to supplement family income; provide care for younger siblings; thwart bullying; gain a global perspective; recover from or facilitate medical conditions, etc. are necessary to meet the demands of society. The landscape of education is in need of fundamental change to address current and anticipated conditions; SB 619 provides a foundation for the necessary transformation.

PARENTS

In light of the comments above, the needs of students must be able to be facilitated by parents. Clearly, there are many types of parents with varying degrees of engagement in the students learning environment. Legislation is an ineffective tool for increasing the level of involvement; it can however remove barriers to choice. Therefore, the only relevant factor when considering parents interest is the best interest of the STUDENT- enacting Senate Bill 619, as well as considering tie barred bills.

EDUCATORS

Educators are monitored and measured under other legislative mandates to ensure quality and provide for corrective action. The bill in front of you for consideration need not address quality directly; rather can be modified to include quality control measures already in place. The passage of SB619 does not limit opportunity for teachers, it enhances opportunity. The potential growth in cyber options will undoubtedly spur economic growth and create jobs. One might argue that because union membership is not required, equitable treatment of educators could suffer; this however is inherently not true- the ability to be or become represented is in no way limited.

SCHOOLS

A consistent argument against SB619 has been the lack of data to support the success of online learning. Obviously, as any emerging venue the passage of time is the only adequate way to gain significant data. Should this impede growth and adaptation to changing environments? Resistance to change and lags illustrate fear and negativity. How must we expect our students and future leaders to respond to changing needs, if we ourselves demonstrate an unwillingness to venture? Conversely, we could look to other models of online instruction for impact, such as in online college records.

An additional argument is that emerging cyber schools are not inhibited from operating for profit. Competition is motivation to become competitive. As a result of increased opportunities in a free market- in order to survive all players must improve their game or become extinct. How can fostering innovation be negative? The winners will be the STUDENTS.

LEGISLATORS

SB619 is an excellent opportunity to emulate that Michigan values choice and is not intimidated by a global shift in education. By example, you can influence and impact education at the fundamental level – the STUDENT.

UNIONS

As mentioned above, union membership is not a stipulation under the proposed legislation. However, the ability to be or become represented is in no way limited- therefore, inconsequential for consideration of SB 619.

Respectfully,


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